Birth fathers' lives after adoption

While considerable research has been carried out on the experiences of birth mothers in adoption, birth fathers remain a relatively neglected group. As part of an ongoing project to redress the balance, **Gary Clapton** explores the life course of a group of 30 birth fathers ranging in age from 35 to late 60s. Beginning with the immediate post-adoption period, he traces the men's early feelings of grief and loss, and in a minority of cases, alleged indifference, through to a spectrum of emotions spanning curiosity, concern, regret and 'connectedness'. Clapton points to similarities with the reported experiences of birth mothers, including a continuing sense of parenthood, and highlights the need to rethink notions of fatherhood. He calls for a greater focus on birth fathers in adoption, not only for their sakes but in the direct interests of the adopted person seeking knowledge of their birth family history.

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For over 35 years professionals in the field have been calling for information about the experiences of birth fathers in adoption. In 1965 Anglim argued that:

> *. . . we have actually been guilty of contributing to the myth that suggests that a child born out of wedlock has only one natural parent.* (p 340)

While understanding has slowly grown in respect of the experiences of birth mothers, it remains the case that we know very little of birth fathers (Clapton, 1997). Insight as regards these 'shadowy figures' (Mason, 1995) has been made ever more relevant by two recent government initiatives. These are, firstly, the introduction of a raft of measures designed to increase the involvement of men in their families. Over the last two years increased paternity leave has been advocated, the rights of unmarried fathers are under review and the National Family and Parenting Institute has been established, with one of its aims being the increased involvement of men in their families (Family Policy Unit, 1998; Department of Health, 1999). Secondly, a series of publications and briefings in 2000 has sought to raise the profile of adoption (Department of Health, 2000; Performance and Innovation Unit, 2000). However, once the question of fathers is linked to adoption, it becomes apparent that our knowledge of the experiences of birth fathers remains almost as poor today as it was 35 years ago.

My research began in 1996 and set out to redress this imbalance. The following discussion is derived from a study of the experiences of 30 birth fathers. The men either responded to an appeal printed in a variety of adoption publications or were approached because they were in touch with post-adoption agencies or had registered on the Adoption Contact Register for Scotland. The men ranged in age from 35 to late 60s. They were invited to give accounts of their birth father life courses, starting with news of the pregnancy through to later-life experiences of searching for and contact with their child who had been given up for adoption, where applicable. The adoptions took place between 1954 and 1985, with most having happened towards the end of the 1960s when the men were in their late teens. The study included an exploration of the nature of fatherhood without the child in question. This was examined in the cases both of men who went on to have other children and those who did not (nine of the group had no further children). The men's hopes for contact in later life and what this signified were also discussed. At the time of the interview ten of the men (one-third) had met their son or daughter. This varied from just one meeting to two years of being in touch. The study also aimed to compare the men's experiences with those of birth mothers (see Clapton, 2000).

This paper is offered as an overview of

the men's lives and thoughts following the adoption – principally the period immediately afterwards – and the nature of their thoughts of the child in the subsequent years. Some analysis of the findings and implications for practice are also included. It should be borne in mind that while valuable in providing a glimpse of an unknown experience, this article deals with only part of a lengthier life course – these birth father narratives span many decades and a variety of events. A comprehensive presentation and discussion of the men's experiences from the pregnancy to contact, where appropriate, is forthcoming (Clapton, 2002).

The immediate post-adoption period

Research findings from studies of women's experiences indicate that the immediate 12-month period following the adoption is a significant chapter in birth mother narratives. It is a time that may be marked by intense feelings of loss and pain (Winkler and van Keppel, 1984). Bouchier *et al* (1991) found a range of reactions to the adoption in the year after the relinquishment of the child. These included feelings of 'anger and resentment' and 'inadequacy and frustration' (pp 50–51). A birth mother is quoted:

I needed to tell somebody how I felt. I was being torn apart and I felt death would have been easier. To say how bad I felt about it and how I could never forgive myself, how hurt I was and how unwanted by anybody. (p 52)

Mindful of the importance of this post-adoption period in the birth mother literature, I wondered whether there was any parallel set of experiences for the 30 birth fathers in the present study. Had there been any impact on them in the weeks and months after the adoption? Did the child continue to 'exist' in their thoughts in subsequent years? If so, how?

Twenty-six of the group were in a position to discuss their lives immediately after the adoption. The other four men only became aware of the adoption some time after the event and so could not substantively discuss their feelings relating to the immediate post-adoption period.

Reports of the year following the adoption were divided between the great majority who experienced distress (21) and five men who reported that the adoption had had little emotional impact upon them. Of the 21 men who reported some degree of discomfort or distress, 14 said that this levelled off. The other seven said that feelings of distress such as anger and bitterness persisted; this last group may be under-represented in the sample, since it is reasonable to assume that men with strong feelings would be more likely to participate in the research.

Strong post-adoption feelings that subside

The 14 men in this group reported various feelings of loss, anger and powerlessness in the weeks and months after the adoption, but eventually these subsided. For them the year following the adoption included a range of adoption-related feelings. The report of one father expresses a common experience. When asked how he had felt during the period after the adoption, he said:

Awful really. Very, very sad. Very mixed feelings. Something I wouldn't have intrinsically done under any other circumstances. There was high emotions of all sorts. There was so much going on at that period of time. I think I was shell-shocked when I look back.

A second became 'very depressed . . . it was a lonely time . . . I could have committed suicide'. Others said that they had 'lost part of me', it was 'like a bereavement' and during this 'traumatic period' they had felt 'anguish'.

One man indicated the impact less directly. He responded that the adoption had had no effect on him because:

I shut it out. I literally put it behind me. I'd never known anyone in that situation before. There had always been kids around. It [having children] was a natural thing. But it was always there.

However, the last part of the above verbatim quotation tends to belie his declaration that he was not affected by the adoption.

Although such initial high emotions levelled off, these men also spoke about a regular presence of the child in their thoughts in the following years. Accounts of the child's continuing 'existence' for the men were diverse but typically, as one man put it, his child 'was always in mind. I have a kid out there. I always remembered his birthday.'

Another said that he had:

. . . never stopped loving him or caring for him. It's like I have a son somewhere out there and it can bring a smile to my face and other times it's like a glow. I just feel good. At other times I feel sad when I think about him.

One man recounted that he had once been struck by feelings that something untoward had happened:

I had this weird apprehension that something had happened to him during childhood. And I had to let him go. I had to pretend that he was dead.

This mechanism was apparently necessary because, to all intents and purposes, his son's welfare was beyond his control. This man also spoke of feelings that drew comparison between the son who was adopted and a second son who had been brought up by him. His relationship with his second son was not as close as he would have hoped. He sometimes speculated that he and the adopted son would have been closer:

I suppose the bit that I feel about M is that a bit of me feels, well, I would love to have somebody who's, you know, possibly just that bit closer, somebody who would take me out for a pint.

One man's feelings subsided to a much greater extent than that of the others. Recurrent thoughts of his daughter were less marked than for many in this group. He simply said that he sometimes 'wondered how she had turned out'.

Persistent feelings of distress

There were seven men in this group. They described emotions that either remained at the same intensity or increased. At the time of the interview some of these men were engaged in extended attempts to locate their child. One man said that the pain that he had felt immediately after the adoption 'never gets any better'. Another reported that his feelings had never changed and added:

It was terribly difficult to cope with. In the intervening years you wonder what she's like. It's her birthday. She's three. How is she getting on? Even to the fact that you wonder 'Is she still alive?'. Something could have happened to her. Not everybody survives childhood. 'Was the adoption successful?' Things triggered it. Suddenly seeing a little girl of that age . . .

Another man, in similar terms to those quoted above, kept an account of his child's development via her birthdays:

As time went by, when I'd see a child I'd think 'B must be that age'. This feeling has become more pronounced as I've got older. There has never been a time when I was completely free.

In the case of another, he reported a similar regularity with regard to the child's presence in his life. In his case this was 'every day' and his thoughts consisted of 'wanting to know' his daughter.

Some men reported that they had experienced a growth in the intensity of their feelings. One man stated that the pregnancy and birth events had had little impact upon him; he had become involved with another woman who was expecting his (second) child and he had bought a flat for them. However, during the adoption arrangements, he had become progressively more agitated as to the welfare of his child who was to be adopted. He opposed the adoption unsuccessfully and was then left with considerable feelings of regret that remained permanently close to the surface:

My stack of emotional baggage has always meant that I have been unable to think of her without feeling tearful and emotional.

One man reported that, five years after the adoption, ongoing distress had led him to undertake a search of all the primary schools in the area where his daughter was likely to be residing. Another explained that he married soon after the adoption, so the subject of children inevitably arose and he began looking in prams for the son who had been adopted. Another said that the subject arose during counselling:

It was actually on the day of his birthday. I had never seen it [the adoption] as my loss. Always only Y's [the birth mother]. I completely broke down and cried.

No impact in the immediate post-adoption period

A minority of five men reported little emotional impact. For these fathers, thoughts and feelings in relation to the child emerged for the first time a number of years later. Their accounts were diverse as to why they felt little or nothing immediately after the adoption and demonstrated varying degrees of denial. One man said that he did not feel anything because the adoption experience had rendered him 'emotionally blocked'. The second man stated that his feelings concerning the adoption 'weren't a major problem'. However, three years after the event:

It started to grate on my mind. It was just there in your brain. The not knowing. Whether she [his daughter] is alive, whether she's alright.

The third man, when asked about his feelings after the birth and adoption, explained these in terms of what he saw as gender differences:

I suppose I blanked it. Yeah, I suppose I was disappointed. I never saw her [the child], there was no hands on. Psychologically it was a different kettle of fish from a man and a woman. We're not the same as women, are we? I was disappointed. I wasn't hurt. I had N [step-daughter], another daughter. I had hands on with her.

This man went on to suggest that his step-parenting role took the place of any activity that would have happened with his first daughter, thus alleviating any negative feelings that may have endured as a result of her adoption. His views and feelings provide a counterpoint to any suggestion that birth fathers will inevitably feel a sense of loss after adoption. This man, as he indicates, seemed to have had his need to parent a daughter satisfied with a second child. Even so, at the time of interview, he was among a number of those who were determinedly searching for their children. This suggests that having a replacement focus for feelings for his adopted daughter had not been sufficient.

Congruences with the experiences of birth mothers

It can be seen from the above accounts that for a large number of the birth fathers the period immediately following the adoption was an emotionally turbulent one, with many reporting feelings of distress and pain. Furthermore, thoughts of the child featured prominently within these accounts. It is therefore suggested that the immediate impact of adoption on birth fathers may have been overlooked by professionals and that there are similarities between the experiences of the men in this study and those reported in the birth mother literature.

Congruence between the two sets of experiences can be seen when a birth mother's report is set between those of two of the birth fathers in the study, with the expression of anger towards self and others:

I became a very angry person after she was born. I used to go to dance halls looking for trouble. I just turned violent for a long time. I used to go out with quite a few guys. We used to get into trouble. Just being stupid. Hitting other people. I turned to drink sometimes. A couple of times I tried drugs. I was having trouble sleeping. I was having back pain. I wasn't mentally ill but I ended up at the Andrew Duncan [a local psychiatric hospital] as an outpatient. What I was doing was punishing myself. I was trying to punish

myself for what I had done. (First birth father)

I drifted further and further from my own family, rejecting them as they had done me. I lost my self-respect and this led to a lack of control, forethought and direction. Drugs, drink and promiscuity were the result. I became unable to trust adults and made myself thoroughly objectionable and argumentative. Eventually I became very depressed and tried to kill myself by taking an overdose. (Birth mother in Bouchier *et al*, 1991, pp 53–54)

I left my parents' house and got lost for a wee while. I drank a lot. Buried my head in the sand. Then it was a lot of bitterness and angerness and a bit like a bereavement. I lost all sense of direction and meaning to life, ran wild, lost my self-esteem. (Second birth father)

Since some birth fathers seemed to experience similar post-adoption reactions to those reported for birth mothers, what of the place of the adoption and the child in the men's subsequent lives? Are there other parallels between birth mothers and birth fathers? Exactly what did these birth fathers think of when they thought of the child?

The child in mind: a spectrum of thoughts, feelings and attitudes

Research on birth mothers has found evidence of a continuance of feelings of loss and, for some, feelings of enduring stress in the years that follow adoption (Baran *et al*, 1977; Deykin *et al* 1984; Winkler and van Keppel, 1984; Millen and Roll, 1985; Bouchier *et al*, 1991; Howe *et al*, 1992; Hughes and Logan, 1993).

Winkler and van Keppel (1984) surveyed 213 birth mothers who had relinquished a first child and found that the relinquished child 'has a continuing presence for the mother'. For a majority of those surveyed, relinquishment was 'the most stressful thing that they had experienced'. A vast sense of loss was reported and accompanied by illustrative comments such as 'part of me is dead' (1984, p 52).

What does the existing literature tell us about the long-term experiences of birth fathers? Although extremely sparse, individual and anecdotal accounts would seem to indicate that some birth fathers may experience feelings of loss and retain a concern for their child (Pannor *et al*, 1971; Concerned United Birthparents, 1983; Silber and Speedlin, 1983; Argent, 1988; Tugendhat, 1992; Wells, 1993; Clapton, 1996; Feast, 1994; Hilpern, 1998; NORCAP, 1998). One birth father quoted in Argent (1988, p 19) spoke of 'a mixture of guilt, curiosity, the certainty of something missing'.

There are only two previous studies focused on birth fathers – by Deykin *et al* (1988) in the USA and Cicchini (1993) in Australia. The findings of each were reviewed in an earlier paper (Clapton, 1997). In their postal survey Deykin *et al* dealt with matters such as attitudes to the adoption and participation (or not) in the process, as well as subsequent marital functioning, parenting and search activity. Cicchini's research served to redress a gap in the earlier Deykin *et al* study in that the psychological and emotional dimensions of the lives of birth fathers were given attention. The Australian study showed that thoughts of the child continued and were associated with a range of beliefs and charged emotions such as worry concerning the child's welfare and feelings of responsibility and affection for their son or daughter. Cicchini (1993, p 18) concludes:

The most significant finding is that the relinquishment experience does not end at the time of adoption, but has enduring effects throughout life . . . These effects emerge most clearly decades later in a desire to be reunited with the child and seek assurance that the child is alright.

In the present study, for most men various triggers in later life led to a resurgence of feelings regarding the child. For some this occurred when receiving professional help. Less extremely and more typically, thoughts of the child were prompted – as for birth mothers – by key dates such as birthdays ('There's never a 7 March goes by without thoughts of him') and

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Regret
Connected

Christmas ('a bad time'). Other occurrences such as the sight of, and contact with, children of the same age as the child who was adopted also instigated feelings about their child. For the 21 men who went on to have other children, their subsequent experiences of pregnancy, the birth and childcare activities all served – from time to time – as prompts for the onset of thoughts of the adopted child. However, thinking about the child was not confined to specific external reminders: for some this occurred 'at quiet moments'.

What was the nature of these thoughts of the child decades later? The men's reports were categorised on the basis of both explicit content and implicit meanings. For instance, those who referred directly to 'a curiosity' were grouped in a category entitled 'curiosity', and men who talked of 'wondering about the child' were also included in the same group. The men who had had experience of contact were asked to think back to how they had thought of the child before their meeting. The reports of this group of ten men therefore had a retrospective character that was influenced by their predominantly positive experiences of contact. However, both groups – those with and those without contact – gave remarkably similar accounts. Most of the men expressed more than one set of feelings, but usually there was a primary one that dominated the response. The frequency of these is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
What do you feel when you think of the child?

Primary feeling	*Number of men*
Curiosity	14
Parenthood	10
Concern/worry	9
Responsibility	7
Loss	6
Love	4
Guilt	4
Regret	4
Connectedness	2

Curiosity
Fourteen men (50 per cent of those who responded) referred to curiosity about the child. Typical statements were:

I'd just like to know what had happened to him, where he'd been, what he'd done. Just like to know, just like to know. Curiosity, simple curiosity.

When she was a teenager: Is she going out dancing? Is she married? And has children? How old is she now?

Concern or worry
Curiosity sometimes shaded into more concentrated interest that became concern or worry for nine of the men (33 per cent):

I wonder what sort of person she is and, as I say, one then starts to worry about if there are tremendous difficulties in her life, either caused by the adoption or just because of who she is. I suspect, although I don't know because I don't have any other children, I suspect it is a parental worry that I have or it is a worry about, I suppose, children in general – in a world full of drugs and muggings, etc. It's a concern but it is also an interest.

Is she alive, is she doing well? Well, I would steam in and help her. If she was a drug addict, or anything, if she was desperate, you'd help her.

In a similar manner to the way that curiosity begins to dovetail with worry, so too do worry or concern shade into feelings of responsibility:

I worry about how abandoned she feels. Is she alive even? We want her to know if ever she needed us, we'd be there for her.

Responsibility
Cicchini (1993) suggested that the sense of responsibility expressed by birth fathers in his study derived from a maturational process. He contended that over the period from their teenage years to the time of the interview, the birth fathers in his study had developed a sense of responsibility towards the child. This

development, he suggests, is part of the process of moving into mature adulthood.

Seven of the men in the present study (23 per cent) described feelings that conveyed a sense of responsibility. Responsibility, obligation and duty were words that were used to describe how they felt about the welfare of the child. Two men spoke of a feeling of 'duty'. One man spoke of his 'duty of care' in relation to the child – in his case to provide himself as a father to her, although he also felt he had not been able to fulfil such a duty.

Another man also spoke of his 'duty':

It's built up. I think brought on by my eldest daughter going to college – rites of passage – made me sort of start thinking. It was always there. I wouldn't say that I am doing it out of duty [registering on a Contact Register], but there is also a certain sense of duty. I'd love to know how she is, how she got on. I'd be frightened about it as well. But I very much want to be available for her.

Another said that when he thought of his child:

I still have all the parental feelings. They won't go away. It's a burden you can never put down.

This man's words convey a sense of having 'shouldered' a (difficult) obligation at the point of having the child adopted.

The widespread belief that good fathers are those who provide (eg Warrin *et al*, 1999) is summed up by a birth father in the literature who asks: 'Who am I if I am not a protector and a providing father?' (quoted in Rosenberg, 1992, p 35). Such a belief coupled with a feeling of having defaulted on it would contribute to these birth fathers' enduring thoughts of responsibility. This would also be linked to feelings of guilt, discussed below.

Parenthood

An overlap between feelings of responsibility, duty or obligation occurs with those of feelings of parenthood. The majority of the studies of birth mothers have pointed to a continuing sense of parenthood (Howe *et al*, 1992; Hughes and Logan, 1993). In this study, ten men (36 per cent) expressed a similar set of feelings:

There's one missing in my family. I wonder what she's like. I think 'waste of potential'. I feel I have abandoned my charge. I regard her as my child. As one that's missing amongst my children.

I've got a 14-year-old in my mind's eye. At the end of the day, in one sense, you can only turn around and say 'she'll always be my little girl'. But I know she's 14, she'll be 15 in June. She's no longer the madam who's growing up. She'll have her own ways.

This man also expressed a belief that:

I can't turn round and say 'she's mine' because I've never met the girl. Although technically, in one sense, she is mine. On the other hand she isn't mine.

An acknowledgement of the division between being a parent with experience of caring for a child and being a biological father with no knowledge of the child was made in four out of the ten accounts that referred to a feeling of parenthood:

I wonder if she's OK, if she's healthy, if her parents are good to her. It depends who I'm speaking to but I sometimes say 'I've got three'. I think of J as a second daughter.

Although S, even if she came back, I'll never be her father. I'm her father biologically.

Love

Two men expressed feelings of parenthood and also said that they felt love for their child. Two others expressed love without directly referring to any feelings of parenthood:

There is a sense in which, I don't know, whatever he's done or hasn't done; or what would happen if he'd turned out and been a murderer or rapist or you know, I

would not love him any the less. I don't think I've ever stopped loving him. Or the thought of him.

The above man was one of a group of nine who did not biologically father another child after the adoption. Others in the group who were explicit in their reference to loving their son or daughter had had experiences of subsequent parenting. In their case they likened their love for the adopted child to that felt for the children that they had had experience of parenting.

Connectedness

Related to these feelings of parenthood and/or love, two men expressed a feeling of connectedness with the child:

Who is he? What's his personality like? I wonder about someone out there that I'm close to. I feel like I know him.

It must be partly love. I'd love to see him. What I did was a wrong thing in one way. I thought we were making the right decisions whatever. It goes against the grain. You're giving up somebody you instinctually love, is part of you.

This sense of a continuing connection and intimacy with the child is echoed in the birth mother literature (Millen and Roll, 1985; Weinreb and Murphy, 1988).

Loss

The literature on birth mothers' experiences has shown a keen sense of loss (Inglis, 1984; Winkler and van Keppel, 1984; Millen and Roll, 1985; Howe *et al*, 1992). In this study six men (22 per cent) spoke of a sense of loss when they thought of the child:

I hope she's well, OK. Then a little bit of anxiety steps in. Helplessness, you want to reach out to something you don't know where it is. You want to reach out and probably say who you are.

I still feel that she's a part of me. It's like something from inside of me is missing. Part of my being in a way.

Loss was deeply felt by at least two of this group who spoke of it in physical terms:

It's like, I don't know, it's like a finger cut off 30 years ago. There's so much to be regretted because we lost this child for that length of time. That's an accurate assessment of the factors. That's what I feel.

There is not a day that goes by when I don't think of him. I feel as if there is something inside me that has been ripped out and I feel empty and nothing is going to fill that.

A similar feeling of physical loss is reported in the research on birth mothers (eg Roll *et al*, 1986).

However, an additional dimension to a sense of loss was reported by the men. This was the loss of missed opportunities to parent the child:

I feel that I've been robbed of his childhood. Seeing him grow up and all his teething, taking him to parks and all that sort of thing . . . football games.

This reference to a sense of loss as regards the activities of parenting may indicate a gender difference in birth parents. What appears not to have been explored in the birth mother research is whether the loss reported by birth mothers concerns any components other than that centred on the 'lost' child. It may be that because fathering is defined by what a man does, birth fathers are more susceptible to feelings of missed activity with the child.

There were connections between expressions of loss and feelings of regret.

Regret

Four men reported that they, *inter alia*, felt a sense of regret about the adoption when they thought of the child. In the case of one man this was added to by a sense of loss:

I think of her as somebody I miss. Somebody that I've missed all these years. Miss the contact. Missed even seeing her as a baby and I think that was totally

unfair. I don't feel that I'm her natural father, that I was responsible for her birth. Had I been present it wouldn't have happened. She would have a different sort of life.

Guilt

Four men said that they felt guilt, typically:

I feel guilty about the rich family life she could have had. I feel like we abandoned her.

This emotion is also present in the birth mother research (eg Hughes and Logan, 1993). In terms of the men's motivations for searching and wish for contact at the time of the interview, such feelings of guilt appear to translate into a need to put 'their side of the story'. Birth father motivations for contact will be discussed in a future paper.

Conclusion

The term 'connectedness' directly used by two men seems to sum up the group of child-centred, emotionally charged thoughts that exist for many of these birth fathers. The fact that such a connectedness exists in the case of men who have never parented the child in question is a surprising finding, even more so for the (few) cases where the child had never been seen. This is a finding that suggests a rethink of conventional notions of fatherhood, in particular those ideas that indicate that men derive their feelings of parenthood from a process of active participation in social caring for the child.

Ten years ago Brinich (1990) remarked on the existence of 'a differentiation between fathers and mothers based upon the assumption that fathering follows the birth'. Brinich suggests that this may be a 'stereotypical view of the development of fatherhood' and goes on to call for its re-examination. She concludes that research with men who have fathered children who were then relinquished for adoption would 'yield much more than the vacuum that previous authors have suggested exists' (p 59).

The present study of birth father experiences indeed points to a sense of continuing connection felt by birth fathers in respect of their child. This even occurs in the absence of having ever seen the child or at most having had a brief contact or glimpse. This finding challenges a stereotypical view that fatherhood is defined by the action of active parenting. This and the similarities between the experiences of birth mothers and those of birth fathers are central findings.

Since many aspects of the thoughts and feelings of adoptive fathers (and their journey to fatherhood) remain virtually unknown, ideas about men in general and their roles in adoption are still largely based on speculation and perhaps stereotyping. The challenge for professionals concerned with adoption is to redress this.

In respect of birth fathers, enhanced insight regarding their experiences and life courses, and their potential feelings about the child – even when adoption has been agreed – should now stimulate a debate about the best means possible to ensure that birth fathers, like birth mothers before, can emerge from the shadows. This could include a greater involvement of fathers in adoption and permanence planning at both individual case and panel levels, targeted post-adoption support for men and, perhaps controversially, an obligation on practitioners not to automatically accept the statement 'father unknown' as acceptable in the future. From the point of view of the adopted adult who in later life may decide to consult their adoption papers, it is often crushing to find out that all that is known about their birth father is – apparently – his first name. A greater focus on the birth father in adoption is in the direct interests of the adopted person who may gain birth family history that has hitherto not been seen as so essential as that relating to the birth mother. The 'myth of one natural parent' is now no longer sustainable.

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